

"Ben"

INDEPENDENT
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As a small boy, Ben lived for a time on Main Street next door to Mr. & Mrs. O.P. McConnell. Mrs. O.P. (Edith) was a quiet, serene woman who, after 40 years of toil as a farmer's wife, much of it - in her time - harsh and demanding, was quite content to sit in her front room by the sunny west window and spend her days knitting work socks for her son. O.P., on the other hand, was still "very much alive," and it is doubtful that Brighton possessed or ever knew a more youthful "sixty something." O.P. could and would foreclose on a mortgage or call in a debt with alacrity and precious little mercy, but he had a soft spot for kids. He'd raised

three sons of his own and there was more than a bit of the "little boy" left in him. A large part of that small person that remained was a love of cookies; particularly his wife's oatmeals, made as only women of Scottish descent and raised in Seymour Township could make. Ben, too, developed an abiding affection for those same cookies. And on many a late afternoon in the side sun porch - just off the kitchen - with milk and oatmeals on the end table, O.P. settled in the "glider" and peered

through his round-rimmed reading glasses and over his beloved Toronto Daily Star at the pensive little chap who perched on the footstool before him. From time to time, both devoted full attention to the expanse of streetscape outside the porch's north windows. And they discussed some pretty important things: How much rainwater did they suppose would run off the roof of the Presbyterian church if you put barrels at both ends? How old did they figure were the great maples that stood before both their houses?

But what tickled Ben most was that O.P. always tiptoed into the kitchen (Edith was knitting in the front room, remember), surreptitiously lifted the lid off the cookie tin and purloined the goodies within like a thief in the night. Ben once queried him, "Mr. McConnell,

you have to sneak 'em too?"

O.P. assured him they tasted better that way.

Around about that same time, week days, 9.00 to 4.00, Ben sat in Miss McGloughlin's 4th grade class room at Brighton P.S. and looked out the window and dreamed. He couldn't see the Presbyterian church from this vantage point, nor the great maples, but he must have found other objects of equally consuming interest. And as the school year wore on, Miss McGloughlin became more and more concerned. Ben had the potential to lead his class, but his marks were dangerously low. Finally, she was moved to call Ben's Mom in for a chat one day

after class.

"Oh, you know," Miss M. explained, "Ben's not a speck of trouble. But he's a dreamer. Always staring out the window. And it's a shame. What he's capable of accomplishing, why, it's just sky-high."

Well, Ben's Mom must have had a rather forceful chat with her number one son, because by year's end, Ben was up at the top of the class where he belonged (though it was responsibly reported that he could still be caught now and then sneaking a peek out that window).

We are all appreciatively familiar with the credits of the adult Ben (though they bear iterating and reiterating). The Family, the law office, the court room, Parliament, St. Paul's, The Masons, The Legion, the Village of Brighton, the Town of Brighton; not to mention the golf course and the "hot" trombone. And then there was the social conscience and the unerring sense of "the right thing to do."

We, and there are so, so many of us, have but late bidden Ben a fond farewell. Citizen Ben. Yes. But also, let's not forget the small boy who gazed out windows and dreamed. Because we hazard the guess that we all may very well have generously benefitted from those childhood dreams.



Over my
shoulder
by Peter McConnell

911 emergency phone system missing 1,000 county residents

By VALERIE MACDONALD
STAFF WRITER

COBOURG — Bell Canada 911 emergency dispatch doesn't have the proper civic addresses for over 1,000 Northumberland County residents, says Bell's 911 service manager, Neil Gerrard.

He estimates 5 per cent of the 25,000 households that came into

the 911 system in February in the rural areas outside of Port Hope and Cobourg — about 1,200 residences — "probably don't have the correct number in the data base."

Letters were sent out to the residents on Feb. 26 but not everyone has replied and there is no way to force people to do so, he said.

Mr. Gerrard's comments come on the heels of complaints about

911 from Northumberland County councillors at their regular general committee meeting last week.

Haldimand Township Reeve Bill Finley related the most serious situation. He said when a person called 911 within the last three weeks, it was busy.

The person, whom he refused to identify, had saved the Trenton ambulance number and called that

service directly, he said. Unfortunately, the patient involved died.

At the recent Rural Ontario Municipalities Association (ROMA) conference there were also reports of "911 failing in other areas," he added. People were advised that they should still know the individual numbers for ambulance, police and fire should the 911 service not work, he added.

Percy Reeve George McCleary said, he too, was aware of that

advice: "Heads of council should do a check". Mr. Gerrard says the new 911 system implemented in the county (outside of Port Hope and Cobourg which has established a 911 system) "can't ring busy" because of the routing system and comprehensive Bell dispatch system that is used.

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